Article 4, Article 7 and Article 10 respectively of the Constitution of the Council.

The Standing Committee of Parliament on External Affairs periodically reviews the functioning of the Ministry of External Affairs and the ICCR. The Standing Committee had set up a special sub-ccmmittee to study the functioning of the ICCR and its report was presented to the Lok Sabha on 19th December, 1995 and was also laid in the Rajya Sabha on the same day.

A detailed action taken report on the various recommendations and observations of the Standing Committee had been submitted by the Ministry of External Affairs.

In view of this Government do not propose to set up a Committee to review the functioning of the Council.

Passport Issued in Punjab

1838. SHRI IQBAL SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of passports issued during the year 1996-97 from the various passport offices of the State of Punjab, district-wise; and

(b) the steps being taken by Government to provide passports at the earliest to the applicants of State?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I. K. GUJRAL): (a) The number of passports issued district-wise by Regional Passport Office, Chandigarh during the year 1996-97 is given in the Statement *(see* below). The number of passports issued by Passport Office Jallandhar is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

(b) Several steps have been taken to simplify procedures with a view to issuing passports expeditiously. The major ones are: (a) issue of 20 year validity passport in addition to 10 year validity passports; (b) upgradation of office facilities including computerisation leading to faster screening and processing of applications; (c) simplification of passport and miscellaneous services forms; (d) issue of passports without any further wait for clearance in cases where police verification reports are not received within the prescribed time limit of four weeks; (e) thorough secrutiny of applications at the acceptance stage itself to check their completeness and correctness in all respects; (f) augmentation of staff strength to reduce and clear pendencies; (g) provision to issue passports in cases of emergency/urgency on out of turn basis on the strength of Verification Certificate issued by an authorised official; and (h) expansion of the list of officials authorised to sign verification certificates.

Statement

Number of Passports Issued District-wise by Regional Passport Office, Chandigarh

Rpo., Chandigarh:

	State	Distt,	1996	1997
A.	PUNJAB	BHATINDA	2691	523
		FARIDKOT	2108	389
		FATEHGARH SAHIB	2955	482
		FEROZEPUR	3536	596

	State	Distt.	1996	1997
		LUDHIANA	23417	4063
		MANSA	636	98
		MOGA	5974	1217
		MUKTSAR	1059	156
		PATIALA	7643	1087
		ROPAR	7596	1486
		SANGRUR	6242	1182
	Total:		63856	11279
B.	HARYANA	AMBALA	2634	747
		BHIWANI	503	94
		HISAR	1559	292
		JIND	498	111
		KAITHAL	1370	300
		KARNAL	2295	570
		KURUKSHETRA	3118	528
		MOHINDERAGARH	206	26
		PANCHKULA	2350	395
		PANIPAT	672	245
		REWARI	238	49
		SIRSA	1023	250
		YAMUNMA NAGAR	2088	326
	Total:		18554	3933
C.	HIMACHAL	BILASPUR	193	39
	PRADESH	CHAMBA	79	19
		HAMIRPUR	495	93
		KANGRA	814	258
		KIRNAUR	28	18
		KULLU	115	20
		LAHAUL SPITI	8	4
		MANDI	738	174
		SHIMLA	832	175
		SIRMAUR	222	26
		SOLAN	532	85
		UNA	1455	248
	Total:		5511	1158
	CHANDIGARH		10482	1500
	TOTAL NO. OF PPTS. ISSUED:		98403	17870